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INTRODUCTION

When Queen Elizabeth of England banished the Franciscans from Ireland at the very end of the sixteenth century, she very clearly had no idea that she was indirectly responsible for one of the most intensive contacts between two small European lands – Ireland and Bohemia. Apart from the activities of the Irish Franciscans, who in Bohemia were called “hyberni” after the Latin name of their homeland, the Irish significantly affected Bohemian history in two further areas; in the less fortunate instance, this concerned the Irish officers who participated in the murder of Albrecht Valdštejn in Cheb and their successors who served in the Imperial forces, and in the happier instance, this concerned the Irish students and, above all, teachers of medicine who worked at Prague University and in Bohemia generally.

This study is an attempt based primarily on archive sources to define the place which the College of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary of the Irish Franciscans of the Stricter Observance in Prague occupied in Bohemian history and to document the activity of its members. Because we were dealing with a hitherto largely neglected theme, we concentrated mainly on domestic sources. We believe that it is only after the wealth of material present in the Czech archives has received appropriate attention that research should address the material in archives abroad.

As is evident from the survey of sources and literature and ultimately from the further text, too, it was extremely difficult to present the history of the college in the form of a simple chronological description of events. On the one hand, we had at our disposal a wealth of material relating to the period of the blossoming of the college in the second half of the seventeenth century as well as documents connected with its dissolution. On the other hand, there are long periods in the eighteenth century for which there are no written records. Some periods cannot be revealed without a study of personalities such as Anthony Bruodin or events such as the dispute about tuition at the archiepiscopal seminary, but this would lead to a serious imbalance in our study. We therefore decided that we would present the history of the Franciscan college in the form of research into various time periods. To those we have added the necessary accounts of a biographical, prosopographical and political nature.

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Chapter 1 with its survey of sources and literature is followed by a summary essay on the Irish in Bohemian society, and then a chapter describing the Irish province of the Franciscans of the Stricter Observance, and the founding and first years of the college. This is linked with a section on the most famous period of the college after the middle of the seventeenth century, then a chapter describing the withdrawal of the Irish Franciscans from public life. The sixth part is a look at the ranks of the turbulent community in 1737. The final chapter deals with the dissolution of the Irish Franciscan college and the secularisation of the buildings and property in the 1780s.

Finally, a list of all the known members of the college and of the guardians is appended.

Strahov, 1 October 2001

The authors

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